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North Korea - Internal

Like the ROK government, the North Korean government is authoritarian and dominated by a single individual

- Unlike the ROK, it is also totalitarian.
- The society is remarkably closed, perhaps uniquely so.
- We know very little about the political pecking order and not much more about internal policy processes and problems.

Nevertheless we have been able to perceive some of the political repercussions of economic problems. We also see signs of a succession problem.

Late in 1972 Kim instituted a series of changes resulting in

- a new constitution
- a consolidated government structure
- a purged and reorganized party.

All of these changes, and the mass campaign that accompanied them, seemed to be closely linked to the difficulties North Korea was encountering in carrying out its economic plans. They also seemed to be intended to increase Kim's personal control and intensify the extraordinary adulation with which he is treated.

The succession problem applies to Kim Il-sung himself -- he is 63 and not very well -- and to Kim's small group of long-time associates -- like him veterans of the post World War II period.

Over the years, Kim has given high position to members of his own family to a degree unusual in a Communist state. It now appears that he wants his son Kim Chong-il -- aged 36 -- to succeed him.

We believe the President has been pursuing this effort for at least the last three years. But we do not know how far the campaign has gone.

-- Within Party circles it appears that Kim Chong-il is being given authority and prestige almost equal to his father's.

-- We believe that media references to the Party Center are indeed references to Kim Chong-il. But he is never mentioned by name in the press or on the radio as the President's successor or in any other capacity.

-- There is some evidence also of at least passive resistance in the party to the idea that Kim Chong-il should succeed his father.

We have no clues as to which of the middle level figures will rise to the top to replace the President's immediate subordinates.

-- This spring the prime minister and the defense minister resigned because of ill health. But they were replaced by men nearly as old as they.

Meanwhile the postponement of the Sixth Party Congress from 1976 to 1977 suggests that there may also be considerable uncertainty over these and other issues remain unresolved.